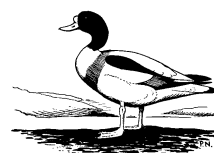


Teesmouth Bird Club Newsletter

August 2016 (No. 64)



Reg. Charity 508850

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*Any material for inclusion in the Newsletter is welcome.
Please send contributions to tbc.projects@hotmail.co.uk*



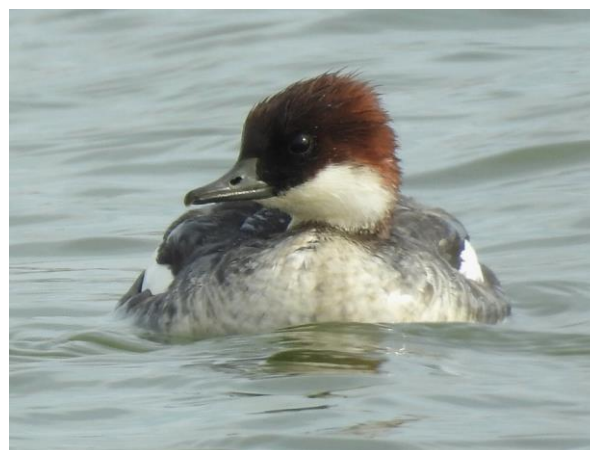
Avocets taking off!

(see page 22)

MONTHLY SUMMARIES

Chris Sharp summarises the Spring sightings which included some good birds in May.

MARCH 2016



Smew, Saltholme

Ian Forrest



Shore Lark, Spion Kop

Ian Watson

Long staying birds at the beginning of the month included the redhead Smew at RSPB Saltholme, Green-winged Teal also at RSPB Saltholme, Glaucous Gull at Jackson's Landing and the two Shore Larks at Old Cemetery. The two Penduline Tits were also still around RSPB Saltholme but often went several days at a time without being seen.

The excellent winter for Great Northern Divers continued. Single birds were off Redcar on 2nd and in Hartlepool harbour on the same date.



Water Pipit, Dorman's Pool

Ian Forrest



Black Redstart, Hartlepool Headland

Martyn Sidwell



Green Sandpiper, Teesside Park

Ian Forrest

Several Water Pipits were around Dorman's Pool early in the month but could often be elusive.

Sadly the Glaucous Gull at Jackson's Landing was found dead on 4th. Both Spotted Redshank and Greenshank were still present around Greenabella at this time. Avocets began to arrive in numbers with 11 on Greenabella on 6th. A Cetti's Warbler was still at RSPB Saltholme on 7th but was not reported subsequently. One or two Long-eared Owls continued to show well in the Haverton scrub.

Three Great Northern Divers were off South Gare on 8th and were regularly reported from here for the rest of the month. A Red-necked Grebe was also in Seaton Channel at this time. The wintering Green Sandpiper continued to frequent the area behind Morrisons at Teesside Park.

A Black Redstart was at Skinningrove on 11th. Eighteen Whooper Swans were at Scaling Dam on the same date. At least 30 Whoopers passed Hartlepool on 12th. A long staying Black Redstart was present here from 13th.

A drake Scaup was on Saltholme Pools on 14th and two Long-tailed Ducks passed Hartlepool on 16th. It had been a poor winter for the latter species with no birds present for any length of time. A Red-necked Grebe was at South Gare on



Penduline Tit, Saltholme

John Baxter

17th. Two Cranes were over nearby Bran Sands on the same date. A Green-winged Teal at Scaling Dam on 18th was a different bird from the long staying Saltholme bird as this bird was still present.

The two Penduline Tits finally settled down from 19th in the small reed bed opposite the Fire Station Pool and showed well here until 28th. Two Ruffs were at RSPB Saltholme on 20th. It had been a poor winter for this species.

Summer visitors started appearing from 23rd with the first Sand Martins. They were quickly followed by Little Ringed Plover and Swallow on 25th and Sandwich Tern and Wheatear on 26th. A Red Kite was over Skelton on 25th with a Jack Snipe on Seaton Common on the same day. Thirty-one Whooper Swans were over RSPB Saltholme on 26th and another Red Kite was over Thornaby on 28th.

It was to prove an excellent spring for Ospreys. The first were over RSPB Saltholme on 29th and Scaling Dam on 30th. A Great Skua was off Redcar on 30th and two Black Redstarts were at Boulby on this date.

APRIL 2016

A Great White Egret on Seaton Common on 1st later moved on to Cowpen Marsh but was not seen subsequently. A Slavonian Grebe was off Saltburn on 3rd. An early Tree Pipit was at Hartlepool on 4th. A Ring Ouzel was at Hummersea the following day and a Black Redstart at South Gare. A Marsh Harrier flew through North Gare on 5th. An early Common Tern was at Redcar on 5th and a Grasshopper Warbler was reeling at Bowesfield on 6th. Both of these were the earliest ever to be recorded in Cleveland.

The first Yellow Wagtail was at Haverton on 9th, on which date four White Wagtails were on Seaton Common and an Osprey was over Belasis. A pair of Garganeys was on Greatham Tank Farm on 10th. Returning winter visitors on this date included 30 Whooper Swans over Long Newton Reservoir, 14 Pink-footed Geese on Saltholme Marsh and two Brent Geese on Seaton Snook.

An early Redstart was at South Gare on 11th along with a Ring Ouzel. Cleveland's earliest ever Pied Flycatcher was present here the following day. A Lesser Whitethroat was at Saltburn on this date and both Ring Ouzel and Brambling were amongst the migrants at Hartlepool.



Slavonian Grebe, Saltholme

Ian Forrest



Common Sandpiper, Scaling Dam

'Mel'

A fine summer-plumaged Slavonian Grebe was on the Allotment Pool on 13th. A Little Gull was nearby on Saltholme Pools. Common Sandpipers arrived en masse on 14th with singles at Scaling Dam, Hemlington Pond and Salterns. Both Sedge and Reed Warblers were recorded over the next couple of days. More unexpected was the Savi's Warbler at Hummersea on 15th. It sang and showed well to the finder but became more elusive as the day went on.

Up to 24 White Wagtails were on Cowpen Marsh on 16th with a Red Kite near Hart on the same day. An Osprey was over Greatham Creek on 18th and five Ring Ouzels were at Hunley Hall. A Marsh Harrier was nearby at Warsett Hill on 20th with another on Dorman's Pool. Up to three Great Northern Divers continued to be reported from South Gare at this time.

More Ring Ouzels continued to be reported over the next few days and as usual the coastal strip near Hummersea saw the majority of birds with up to five reported. A Whinchat was at Seaton Common on 21st and 19 Whimbrels were at Greatham Creek. A Long-eared Owl was at Hummersea on 22nd. The first Swift was over RSPB Saltholme on 23rd.



Whimbrel, Cowpen Marsh

Ian Forrest



Grasshopper Warbler, Dorman's Pool

Ray Scott

A late Whooper Swan was at South Gare on 26th and was presumably the bird seen on Cowpen Marsh the following day. A Wood Warbler sang at Flatts Lane on 28th on which date 11 White Wagtails were at RSPB Saltholme. Another Osprey was over Bowesfield on 29th.

MAY 2016



Marsh Harrier, Saltholme

John Baxter

May 2016 proved to be an excellent month for birdwatching in Cleveland with several rare species recorded.

The month began with an Iceland Gull on the beach at Redcar on 1st. Two Marsh Harriers were touring the North Tees Marshes early in the month and a Hen Harrier flew through Dorman's Pool on 2nd. A scattering of migrants at the coast included Whinchat, Tree Pipit and Cuckoo.

Scaling Dam was the place to be on 3rd with Osprey and both Marsh and Hen Harrier seen. Yet another Osprey was over Kirklevington on 4th. A Curlew Sandpiper was at RSPB Saltholme on 5th along with a Black Tern. A Little Stint was present here on 7th. No Temminck's Stints were to be found this month in what proved a disappointing month for passage waders.

The 8th proved to be a cracking day. Migrants at the coast included Spotted Flycatcher, Garden Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat and Black Redstart. A Hen Harrier was over Greatham Creek and five Spoonbills were at RSPB Saltholme. This latter site also saw up to 14 Black Terns and two Whiskered Terns. The latter were only the third county record and they stayed for the next two weeks often to be seen from the cafe window.

A Citrine Wagtail at Seaton Common on 10th was only the fourth county record and the first adult to be seen. A Pied Flycatcher was nearby and a Little Stint was at South Gare.

The following day a Great Reed Warbler sang loudly at the Allotment Pool. It was extremely elusive during its four day stay and most



Whiskered Tern, Saltholme

Ian Forrest



Citrine Wagtail, Seaton Common

Ian Forrest



Spoonbills, Saltholme

Ian Forrest

observers had to be content with just hearing the bird. With the five Spoonbills, two Whiskered and several Black Terns still around, Saltholme certainly had a feeling of southern Europe about it at this time. Pied Flycatchers increased to two on the Zinc Works Road, a Wood Sandpiper was nearby on Seaton Common and a Black Redstart was at Warsett Hill.

A male Bluethroat was trapped at Hartlepool on 13th. It was still present the following day and proved very popular with the local photographers. Another Bluethroat was seen briefly at Boulby on this date. A Grey-headed Wagtail was in the same location as the Citrine from 13th. Although



Bluethroat, Hartlepool Headland

Martyn Sidwell



Grey-headed Wagtail, Seaton Common

Ian Forrest

only a sub-species it proved popular and was joined by a Blue-headed Wagtail 14th to 15th. A Jack Snipe was also seen here on 15th.

The pace slowed over the next few days with just a few Little Gulls and Garganeys at RSPB Saltholme to keep the birders entertained. Four of the five Spoonbills left on 15th but the other remained into July.

A Black Kite flew over RSPB Saltholme on 19th but was sadly only seen by a single observer. This is a species much needed by many for their county lists. A Great Northern Diver flew past Saltburn on 21st and an Osprey was over South Gare on 23rd.



Blue-headed Wagtail, Seaton Common

Ian Foster



Spotted Flycatcher, Hartlepool Headland

Colin Small



Red-backed Shrike, South Gare

Martyn Sidwell

A small fall of migrants on 26th saw Icterine Warblers at both South Gare and Hartlepool. The latter bird was trapped. A Bluethroat was also seen at Hummersea. Two Spotted Flycatchers were at Hartlepool the following day and a Quail was singing at Eastfields Farm.

Two Glossy Ibises were tracked down the coast on 28th. They flew past Hartlepool and circled the Tees estuary before landing briefly several times at RSPB Saltholme before continuing their journey south. A fine male Red-backed Shrike was at South Gare on 29th. Unusually 26 Sanderlings were seen at Scaling Dam on 31st.

JUNE 2016

Inevitably after the excitement of the previous month June proved to be a much quieter month.

Strong northerly winds early in the month saw large numbers of auks passing the coastal headlands. They also brought a Great Northern Diver into the harbour at Hartlepool on 1st and were presumably responsible for the five Arctic Terns at RSPB Saltholme on this day and the Fulmar which flew over on 2nd.

A male Red-backed Shrike at South Gare 4th-5th proved to be the only scarce passerine during this time. The wet grasslands proved attractive to waders not least Avocets. At least 10 pairs bred successfully here and other pairs were present at other sites on the North Tees Marshes. It is not that long ago when the first pair bred at Teesmouth. Other waders on the wet grasslands during the first week of the month included displaying Ruff, three Curlew Sandpipers, Greenshank, 15 Knots and Black-tailed Godwits. Up to four Little Gulls were also present.

The long staying Spoonbill was often to be seen on Paddy's and with two Marsh Harriers in the area, RSPB Saltholme was the place to be.

Nothing of note was recorded over the next few days. The Scoter flock off Redcar built up with 160 plus Common Scoters present on many days. A fine drake Surf Scoter was found amongst them on 18th but was only present for a few hours. Three Velvet Scoters were also seen.

A drake Mandarin visited Scaling Dam on 18th and a female type was briefly at Bowesfield on 24th. Several Garganeys were around RSPB Saltholme at this time raising hopes that they might be breeding.

Small numbers of passage waders appeared on the North Tees Marshes during the last days of the month. Two Spotted Redshanks were at Saltholme on 21st, three Wood Sandpipers were on the Tidal Pool on 23rd, up to 12 Whimbrels were at Salterns and Black-tailed Godwits peaked at 60 at Saltholme on 28th.

47 Manx Shearwaters flew past Old Nab on 26th. Hopefully the next few months would see many more good sea watching days.



Avocet, Saltholme

RSPB

TBC COMMITTEE NEWS

Club Chairman Brian Clasper summarises the latest work of the Committee.

The Club's trustees met in April and July to well-attended meetings. Many ongoing issues were discussed but the principal points were as follows.

The "Ted Parker Memorial Hide" was officially opened on May 6th by his widow, Ruth. It was an emotional and proud occasion for all those in attendance at the relocated hide at Scaling Dam. The Northumbrian Water Authority were very generous toward us and our thanks were passed on. The occasion also allowed me to reflect on the unrecognised work carried out by our many members on various committees and, in this case, the team who helped build and maintain this valuable site. May I pass on our deepest gratitude.

The other structure to be built in memory of Ted is the "Ted Parker Tower" which is to be located on the south side of Dorman's pool, RSPB Saltholme. At last a degree of persistence by certain members has now reached the stage of a site meeting, and then a planning application with view to building work starting late Autumn this year. Watch this space!

The Club also continues to donate £200 per year of seed to Billingham Bottoms/Cowpen Bewley Woodland Parks and Saltburn Valley Gardens. We are now negotiating with Friends of Stillington Nature Reserve (with the help of Barbara Crinson) to establish a feeding station here as of the end of September.

To our July meeting we welcomed Dan McKie, a familiar respected Teesside birder, as a trustee to the TBC committee. His immediate contribution was to try and organise a security event in collaboration with Cleveland Constabulary whereby we can code & secure our birding optics using the "Smartwater" technique or similar. We will keep you informed on this.

Alistair McLee has been very active and told us of the expansion of the UK coastal path involving a path along the side of the Calor gas pool to the Petroplus area and beyond, As well as the environmental agency heightening the bund on the south side of Greatham creek, east of the bridge.

So busy times ahead.

A full report on the opening of the Ted Parker hide is on page 15

CONSERVATION COMMITTEE NEWS

Alistair McLee reports on interesting developments on the North Tees area.

STRENGTHENING OF COASTAL DEFENCES BY GREATHAM CREEK

In an earlier article I described the breaches to be made in the sea wall on the upstream side of the creek to allow sea water to enter the northern part of Cowpen Marsh. Work on the building of the new sea wall further inland to the south was planned for this year. This now appears unlikely, probably due to prolonged negotiations with the land owner and the Environment Agency (EA). Instead, the EA have brought forward plans to raise and reinforce further the sea wall downstream of the creek, on the south side. I am sure you will all recall the earlier breach of the original wall a couple of years ago and the prolonged inundation of the brine field. I highlighted this new plan in the Club's website forum to invite individual members to write to Stockton Planning Office on the following issue of concern. Hopefully some may have done so.

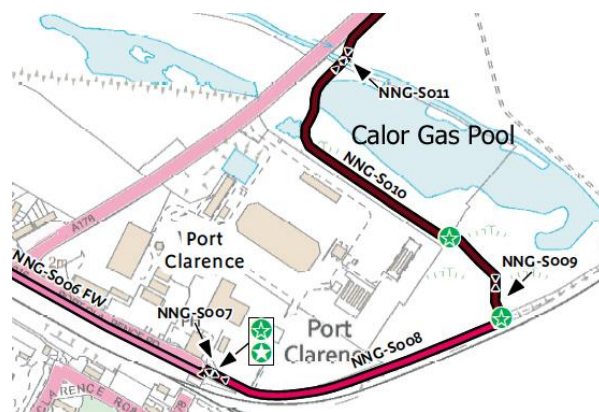
The Club's concern was essentially that the new, higher and broader structure would prevent viewing from the existing path over the saline lagoons. The plans did not show the diversion of the path to run along the new crest of the barrier. At the time of writing the Club is unaware of what if any measures have been taken to address this matter. The plans show that the construction process will require the infilling of the gully between the road and the redundant roadway past the Avocet viewing point at "bus stop" hide. Furthermore, on a temporary basis, the site cabins will be positioned between the road and the new sea wall by the bus stop at Salterns. With all these goings-on no doubt there will be traffic disruptions as well.

For further details Google the Stockton Planning Portal and insert the reference planning number 16/1461/EIS and all will be revealed.

ENGLISH COASTAL PATH (ECP)

The clue is in the title and it is coming to Cleveland. The final object is to have a path for walkers all around the English coast line. This article concerns the stretch north of the Tees, from the Newport Bridge to the North Gare. Unsurprisingly, the path will be unable to follow intimately the riverside as much of it is owned by construction industry or chemical processes. Subsequently, the route will be along pavements or, where these do not exist, beside roadways – the A178. However it is not all as grim as that sounds and opportunities for improved bird watching will arise.

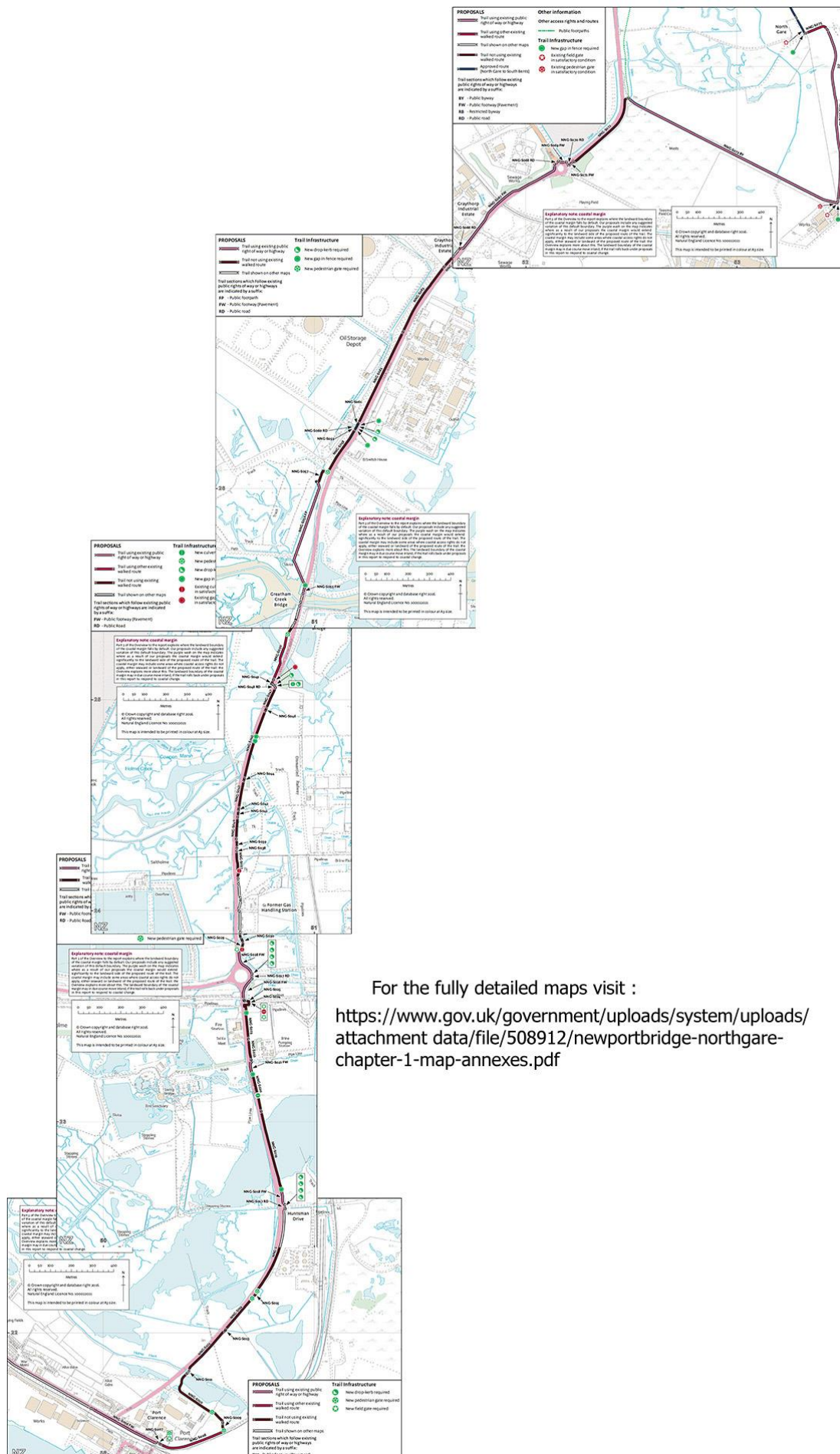
Serious money is to be spent creating hard surfaces suitable for disabled access. These will run close to the main road but not on the verge itself, but rather on the land close to the existing fence line. Where there is a water body, this will be bridged or crossed by a boardwalk. The same strategy applies to service ditches carrying pipelines. For those afraid of fierce herbivores, a second fence will be built on the side next to the field. All this will mean that WeBS counters, general birders and photographers are not silhouetted against the skyline and not liable to becoming a road accident statistic. The downside is, of course, that the advantage of height when viewing is reduced – a small price to pay.



Viewing of the Calor Gas pools will be improved, as the path will run along the north side of the storage yard and be screened off so as not to disturb the birds. Birds which could previously offer only distant views through the hedge will now be more closely approachable. Similarly the views across Saltholme East will be safer and screened by a thin edge of reeds in the narrow, shallow area parallel to the road. Exactly what will happen at the Seal Watch Point area of Cowpen Marsh, is unclear at present. These details await negotiations with the land owner and the Environment Agency (EA) over the coastal retreat plans for the marsh, to be resolve. Access to the coast proper from the A178 will be along the Zinc works Road.

Whether the ECP and its walkers will create disturbance is a moot point. I cannot conceive there will be large numbers wishing to enjoy the experience, and the potential for disturbance will rather be from those watching birds. Sensitive areas are to be screened and elevated figures on the skyline should cease to be an issue. Car parking and some access points to the path will be a consideration.

A composite map of the route is shown on the next page.



For the fully detailed maps visit :
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/508912/newportbridge-northgare-chapter-1-map-annexes.pdf

BTO REPORT, AUGUST 2016

Vic Fairbrother summarises the progress of bird surveys that apply to the Cleveland area, including some where more volunteers would be welcome.

BREEDING BIRD SURVEY & WATERWAYS BREEDING BIRDS SURVEY

The BBS Report for 2015 was published in July and includes an introduction to WBBS for the first time. Surveyors should be receiving their printed copies shortly and copy can also be viewed on the BTO website. I am most grateful to local volunteers who surveyed 27 BBS and two WBBS squares in Cleveland this year. Volunteers wishing to take part in the Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey on their BBS squares need to contact Sarah Harris so she can register them with the new WCBS data entry system.

sarah.harris@bto.org

HOUSE MARTINS NEST STUDY

The House Martin Nest Study is reported to be going well with over 1000 nest sites signed up for monitoring nationwide. Take up in Cleveland has been rather low. The poor spring probably did not help this year and there were reports of House Martins not returning to some traditional sites, or else in low numbers.

<http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/house-martin-survey/house-martin-nest-study-2016>

BREEDING WADERS OF ENGLISH UPLAND FARMLAND

This was a challenging survey, both to organise at such short notice and to carry out. The take-up of tetrads has been good in most areas and volunteers are surveying four of the six priority squares allocated to Cleveland. Very prompt submission of data (by the end of August) is requested to enable the analysis of data and completion of the final report by early 2017. Greg Conway is leading this project and can be reached by email at greg.conway@bto.org.

WOODCOCK SURVEY (annual breeding counts)

Following the 29% decrease in breeding numbers between the 2003 and 2013 GWCT/BTO surveys, annual counts are welcomed to monitor the apparent ongoing decline in our breeding population. For details see :

<http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/woodcock-survey>

Results can be found at :

<http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/woodcock-survey/results>

Nationally, 50 to 100 occupied sites have been covered annually since the 2013 survey but more sites are now needed to provide better coverage

across the British breeding range. For this monitoring, only occupied sites need to be covered and 2013 surveyors are encouraged to continue visiting their squares. New volunteers may select their own sites. Please contact me if you are willing to take part. Greg Conway is leading this project (greg.conway@bto.org).

COLONIAL BIRDS RECORDING SCHEME

The Heronries Census has expanded into the Colonial Birds Recording Scheme and is now an on-line system covering Little Egrets and any other herons. Traditional local sites are currently monitored by Martin Blick and Alistair McLee. I would welcome details of any new sites located. John Marchant who has organised this census for many years handed over to Ian Woodward at the end of June. John joined the BTO staff in October 1973 and has been involved in a wide range of surveys including the Common Birds Census, Rook Survey, Waterways Breeding Bird Survey, Heronries Census, Winter Thrushes and Re-trapping Adults for Survival. He played a pivotal role in the Migration Atlas and was responsible for copy-editing and proof reading much of Bird Atlas 2007-11. He has been on the British Birds Rarities Committee, British Ornithologists Union Records Committee, a County Bird Recorder and co-organiser of the Norfolk Bird Atlas.

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY

The 2014/15 Wetland Bird Survey report was published in April 2016. There is much fascinating information on wetland birds at local sites available online thanks to the team of local WeBS counters in Cleveland.

<http://www.bto.org/webs-annual-report>

Most of the **Non-Estuarine Waterbirds Survey** (NEWS) data are now in and coverage was good. Across the UK 1890 priority sectors (75% of the total) were covered and a further 1735 non-priority sectors, equating to over 4400 volunteer hours in the field. Reports have been provided to the country agencies outlining coverage, but a full analysis will be carried out later in the year once the WeBS core counts for the winter have been received. The local coordinator for Cleveland was Chris Sharp.

EUROPEAN BREEDING BIRDS ATLAS

Fieldwork for the EBBA2 is in its fourth year (it goes until 2017) and records are sought from across Europe (see <http://www.ebba2.info/>). You can submit records using the global data entry in BirdTrack (www.birdtrack.net) as well as many other online bird recording systems; whichever you use it's important to include a breeding evidence code where you can. Complete lists and casual records are useful but the most valuable contribution would be to take on atlas squares in

countries, mainly in eastern Europe, attempting their first ever atlases. The website above can direct you to national coordinators for more information.

PROJECT OWL

Project Owl is provisionally aimed for autumn 2017. It is still to be determined what is achievable in terms of survey scope and within budget. In the meantime, the results of some trial fieldwork carried out in 2015 has been published in a paper in Bird Study "Playback survey trial for the Little Owl *Athene noctua* in the UK". For details, see :

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00063657.2016.1180344>

BIRDTRACK

New information from BirdTrack has been loaded to the Eurobirdportal :

<http://www.eurobirdportal.org/>

You can now see records from 2010–2014. This is a good way to visualise migration across Europe.

As always the work of local birders who contribute data to the various BTO surveys is much appreciated, not least by the local organiser.

SPEAKERS AT CLUB MEETINGS 2016/17

The following speakers and their talks have been arranged by **Julie Mason** for the forthcoming season.

5th September 2016 'Swallows of a Moorland Valley' Geoff Myers & Allan Snape

3rd October 2016 'The Salterns Wetlands: Creating intertidal habitat on a brownfield site' Dorian Latham

7th November 2016 'Birds and Climate Change' Sir John Lawton

5th December 2016 'The Rock - Birding one of the Western Palearctic's Hotspots' Stewart Hinley

9th January 2017 'Durham Upland Birds - The work of the Durham Upland bird study group' David Raw

6th February 2017 'Rare birds of Durham' Chris Bell

6th March 2017 'South Africa - Cape to Kruger and beyond' Graeme Joynt.

3rd April 2017 A.G.M. Subject to be announced

Meetings are in Stockton Library at 7:30 pm . Entrance to the library is from the car park at the rear.

IAN LAWSON

While this Newsletter was being put together, we received the sad news of the death, after a long illness, of Ian Lawson.

Ian was a well-known member of the Club, having first joined over 45 years ago. He was noted for his artwork and produced many of the species vignettes used in 'The Breeding Birds of Cleveland'.

An obituary will be published in the next Newsletter.



Ian's drawing of a Treecreeper for the Club's Breeding Bird Atlas

REQUESTS

Can you help with these?

THE TEES VALLEY WILDLIFE TRUST'S WOODLAND DIARY PROJECT

We want to capture the essence of how the ancient woodlands of East Cleveland change through the seasons by using the inspiration of early nature journals to create a collective digital diary of three different woodlands. The woodlands for the project are Saltburn Gill, Saltburn, Hagg Wood near Moorholm and Clarkson's Wood, Loftus. Could you help the project by taking bird and other wildlife photographs and uploading them to our special website? We would also be interested in sounds of the woods, especially if you can identify the bird calls. The project, funded by National Lottery players through the Heritage Lottery Fund, will run for twelve months from June 2016. It includes a programme of events including expert-led walks, photographic and botanical sketching workshops and a visit to the Great North Museum.

For more information contact Kate Bartram, East Cleveland Heritage Officer, Tees Valley Wildlife Trust. email kbartram@teeswildlife.org tel : 01287 636387 or visit the project website www.teeswildlife.org/woodlanddiaries/

AN APPEAL FOR OLD BINOX

A keen birder from Richmondshire has taken up a teaching post in a Cleveland school and he is in the process of setting up a bird club for the pupils. At the moment, he is very short of optics.

The Club Committee agrees that it would be a fitting and welcoming gesture to a newcomer to the county if members could possibly consider donation of their old binoculars. Please check to see if there are any gathering dust somewhere!

It is important that we try every avenue to encourage more young people to engage with the natural world.

If you are able to help, please contact Barbara :

Tel 01748 850476

Email barbaracrinson @ hotmail.com

REPORT ON LOCAL OUTING

NIGHTJAR OUTING TO GUISBOROUGH FOREST

Bert Mitchell

On 6th July we met as arranged at Guisborough and ten cars were taken into Guisborough Forest. Arranging the outing proved difficult this year because of the poor weather we have been having, but after having received permission from the Forestry Commission and the land owner, and having notified the Police we went ahead as the weather appeared suitable. We arrived in the forest when it was still light but a male Nightjar was up early and gave good flight views and then landed on top of a tree stump where it stayed in full view about 50 yards (or should I say metres) away for at least five minutes and everybody was able to get a good view of the bird. Flight views of the birds were regular during our stay including one bird that decided to check us out and flew low over our heads. At least three males were heard churring and the contact flight call was constantly being heard. Two Woodcocks were also seen in display flight. Everybody present appeared to be highly delighted with the sights and sounds available and I can confidently say that it was an improvement on last year. I would like to thank John Money for help in arranging the event and checking that all the cars returned and various gates were closed as we left. From the responses received I feel that a good time was had by all who attended.

Bert Mitchell

LOCAL OUTINGS AUGUST TO DECEMBER 2016

SEA WATCHING AT HARTLEPOOL HEADLAND

Saturday 27th August 2016

Meet at the Heugh Gun Battery from 9.00 a.m. Join Chris Sharp for this always popular outing. If the weather conditions are favourable almost

anything is possible at this time of year. Four species of Skua and two species of Shearwater are the targets. Even if it is a westerly there still should be something of interest to see such as Common Scoter and Teal. If the sea watching is poor there may be something to be found in the nearby gardens.

Leader: Chris Sharp (Tel: 01429 865163)

SALTERN WETLANDS

Sunday 18th September 2016

Meet at the Teesmouth National Nature Reserve car park at 2.30 p.m. The afternoon walk is timed to coincide with the incoming high tide. The walk gives members a chance to experience this newly created habitat immediately north of Greatham Creek. Hopefully a good selection of passage waders should be present along with returning winter ducks such as Wigeon and Teal.

Leader: Chris Sharp (Tel: 01429 865163)

BIRD RINGING AT HARTLEPOOL HEADLAND

Sunday 9th October 2016

Join the Tees Ringing Group to witness a demonstration of how migrant birds are caught, processed and released. It is hoped that a variety of small birds will be caught. Given the date almost anything is possible. Meet at the bowling green by Olive Street from 9.00 a.m.

Leader: Chris Brown (Tel: 01429 233474)

SOUTH GARE

Saturday 5th November 2016

Meet by the Lifeboat Station at 9.30 a.m. Join Herbert Mitchell for a morning walk. Hopefully a wide selection of late autumn migrants may be present including Redwing, Fieldfare and Goldcrest. Twite and Snow Buntings are also possibilities. The sea should also be of interest with a variety of sea ducks and divers always likely. Last year's outing saw Grey Phalarope and Curlew Sandpiper.

Leader: Herbert Mitchell. (Tel: 07870451648)

GREENABELLA MARSH AND SEAL SANDS

Sunday 4th December 2016

Meet at 9.30 a.m. in the Teesmouth National Nature Reserve car park for a walk down Greenabella Marsh and along the sea wall at Seal Sands. Recent winters have seen Greenshank, Spotted Redshank and Whimbrel wintering in the area. Seal Sands should hopefully hold a selection of sea ducks, divers and grebes. Both Barn and Short-eared Owls are also possibilities.

Leader: Julie Mason. (Tel: 01642 614583)

WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

Dean Heward, the Assistant Warden at the RSPB Saltholme Reserve, gave a presentation under this title at the Club's A.G.M. in April. The intention was to explain the necessity for the various management practices which are sometimes misunderstood. This is a text version of the presentation.

In managing RSPB Saltholme, we focus on the Conservation of Priority Species, and on the Engagement of Visitors.

CONSERVATION OF PRIORITY SPECIES

This is dictated by various statutory and non-statutory designations. The statutory designations are :

The Birds Directive, which is the European Commission Directive (79/409/EEC) on the Conservation of wild birds. Saltholme forms part of the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast Special Protection Area (SPA). The 'interest feature' for which is the assemblage of wintering waders and wildfowl

The SPA itself is made up of component Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) which are designated under UK legislation (The 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act). The Tees and Hartlepool Foreshore & Wetlands SSSI is in turn made up of component parcels of SSSI land.

The SSSI parcels which the RSPB manages are:

Haverton Hole
Little, Triangle and Square Pools
Back, West and East Saltholme Pools
Dorman's Pool

The SSSI citations quote these species as assemblages:

Wintering: Shoveler, Teal, Wigeon, Gadwall, Lapwing, Golden Plover

Breeding: Shoveler, Pochard, Little Ringed Plover, Great-crested Grebe, Little Grebe

RSPB has a legal requirement to safeguard these assemblages and promote and enhance their conservation status. In addition to this, Approval (consent) needs to be sought from Natural England for all works on SSSI land.

The Wildlife and countryside Act 1981. This is our national legislation. The schedules in the Act list species which are specially protected :

Schedule 1 (birds): Garganey, Bittern, Marsh Harrier, Avocet

Schedule 5 (animals): Water Vole, Otter and all Bats

Non-statutory designations: These are not legally binding, but are more for guidance.

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. This places a duty on

public bodies in England 'to have regard' to conserving biodiversity as part of their policy or decision making

Section 41 of the Act is a list of species of which these are present at Saltholme : Bittern, Lapwing, Skylark, Grasshopper Warbler, Starling, Song Thrush, Dunnock, Tree Sparrow, Yellow Wagtail, Linnet, Bullfinch.

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan has a list of priority species very similar to the NERC section 41 list. In addition, each county has a Local BAP, with its own additional priority species. Brown Hare and Harvest Mice are listed for this region.

Red listed birds: the Red and Amber Lists are produced by BTO/RSPB.

Red Listed species are : Pochard, Lapwing, Skylark, Grasshopper Warbler, Starling, Song Thrush, Tree Sparrow, Yellow Wagtail, Linnet,

We have an obligation to conserve all these listed species, but management works must prioritise the species because we are not able to conserve everything. This is because positive action for one species can negatively affect something else. Harvest Mice are a good example as they are adversely affected by the grassland management for birds. The other limitation is our very limited resources. Consequently, we have to evaluate what we have and produce a prioritised list of features.

The most important features for RSPB Saltholme are the wintering and breeding bird species which are listed in the SPA and SSSI 'citations'. After these come the species listed in Schedules 1 and 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, followed by the species listed in the non-statutory designations lists.

In management planning, for the highest priority species (features), we set targets – what we want the populations to be. These have to be realistic and achievable. Then we look at all the factors that affect that feature:

Positive factors are why those species are here, and what makes them thrive, while *Negative factors* potentially harm them or could reduce their populations.

Producing the list of factors is when we learn that you cannot conserve anything unless you first understand it. We then work out how to enhance the positive factors, and ameliorate negative factors. This then leads to projects, scheduled in a five- year costed work programme.

We then repeat the whole process for the next most important feature: feature 2..... then feature 3 and so on...

We monitor to find out if what we are doing is effective. Monitoring is repeated (and repeatable) surveys. However, there is no point in wasting precious resources and monitoring for the sake of monitoring. So again we set priorities based on what we need to know.

If target species, assemblages or communities decline, this tells us or that there is a problem, either at Saltholme or somewhere else in the world where our birds spend the summer or winter. If the problem is at Saltholme: we need to find out why, and management may need to change.

VISITOR ENGAGEMENT

This is crucial since we will never conserve wildlife without the support of the public.

At Saltholme, we try to do this by getting visitors close to nature and providing a spectacle to inspire them. We also have Saltholme Guides to inform visitors and show them wildlife that they might not have seen themselves.

We do lots of educational work and hold events such as pond dipping and 'Soup and Starlings'. Some of the events may appear to have little to do with nature conservation, but the idea is to get people in here so that they get that contact with nature that hopefully makes them want to support our work.

As a generation, we have largely failed to protect nature. So we need the children of today to grow into the conservationists of tomorrow. We need to switch them on and inspire them, to keep them inspired and motivated through their teenage years so they can take forward what we have begun. This means we need every child to enter every hide and think "wow".

But getting that spectacle in front of every hide is extremely difficult but essential because a hide that requires a telescope to see anything is of no use to us in this respect.

HOW WE DO WHAT WE DO

Wet grassland

Wet grassland is managed to arrest ecological succession and to create ideal conditions for breeding and wintering wetland birds. A combination of grazing and a hydrological regime create these conditions. The grassland is flooded in winter and slowly drawn down through spring and summer. The areas of water (pools and ditches) provide aquatic insects for feeding chicks.

If it is found necessary, water is pumped on to the wet grassland daily in early spring, which

means the feeder ditches need to be maintained free of aquatic vegetation that would reduce the water flow.

Cattle create a tussocky sward suitable for breeding Redshank, Snipe and ducks.

Sheep grazing produces a more lawn-like sward preferred by breeding Lapwing and wintering Wigeon. Winter sheep grazing also reduces the growth of Ragwort.

To facilitate grazing management, fences need to be maintained stock proof, and animals need to be checked daily.

Wetland birds like to feel secure in an open landscape. They don't like anything that a Corvid could perch on or a Fox could hide in. That is why scrub is controlled on wet grassland and its boundaries. On the Ouse Washes, which are very large fields, Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe will not nest within 50m of anything a Crow can perch on or a Fox hide in.

At Saltholme, we can't create such conditions because our fields are much smaller and we have an anti-predator fence. We can however, control breeding sites for predators, so scrub is removed from the wet grassland and shrubs on wet grassland boundaries are kept at approx 1.5m in height, so that Corvids can't nest in them but they can be used by passerines such as Stonechat.

Reedbeds

Sight lines are maintained from the Watchpoint Hide called the Watchpoint Cuts. These are cut with shears monthly through the growing season. Noisy equipment is not used in the breeding season. At Haverton, a Truxor is used in winter to create rides through the reedbed for feeding Bitterns and other birds.



The Truxor

Tern islands

These have to be cleaned twice per year, just before nesting and at the end of the season to

remove colonised vegetation and goose excrement, which contains annual weed seeds and a growing medium. However, complete eradication of vegetation is not ideal, as it provides some cover for tern chicks. New cockle is added where necessary.

Tern rafts

These are put out in May, after the Black-headed Gulls have settled on nests, and as the Common Terns arrive. They are stored inshore over winter to protect them from winds and to keep Black-headed Gulls from settling on them before the terns arrive.

Sand Martin bank

This needs to be packed down with additional builders sand from the top each February. Filling the old holes in helps reduce nest parasites. At the end of the season, the pool in front of the Sand Martin bank is cleared of vegetation to keep it open and prevent access to the bank by mammalian predators. While the birds are in attendance, the vegetation in front of the pool is cut periodically to maintain the view from the Visitor Centre. This is done as quickly as possible (within 15 minutes) to reduce disturbance to the Sand Martins.

Dragonfly Ponds

Each pond is divided into three open areas for territorial dragonflies. Most of the Dragonflies you see at ponds are the territorial males waiting for a female to arrive. The ponds are cleared each September, hopefully, before the autumn rains, as these are deep ponds.

The Meadow

The Meadow is managed for floristic diversity. Wild flowers do better in nutrient poor fields as there is less competition from rank grasses and nettle which are able to take advantage of the excess nutrients. The meadow is cut in August by tractor and grazed over winter by sheep. This cropping reduces fertility of the soil. Yellow or Hay Rattle is being introduced, as it is a parasite of grass, making more space for flowers to germinate. The northern end of the meadow is not cut so as to provide habitat for Harvest Mice which leave the reedbeds in autumn and move into tussocky grassland.

Haverton wild flower walk

To reduce fertility this area is grazed with sheep in winter. The sheep are moved on and off daily due to the proximity of Port Clarence and the open access there. Additional cutting is undertaken in the autumn by the Estate Team.

Water level control

To attract feeding waders in front of the Phil Stead Hide, the water level of Bottom Tank is lowered in early April and again in July, to expose mud containing *Chironomid* (non-biting) midges and their larvae, which are the principal food of wading birds. It is raised again in autumn to try and kill off some of the grass. It takes five weeks of flooding to kill off growing grass and the knack is fitting this in after the autumn wader passage and before the winter frosts.

Dorman's Pool is large and shallow with a flat bottom, making gradual drawdown difficult. The water level is kept low for feeding waders in spring/summer and higher for waterfowl in winter.

Views from hides

These involve creating and maintaining sight lines from hides, through vegetation such as Reed, Sedge and Rush. This is generally done in July after the breeding season. Remember that if we are to ever succeed in saving nature, we need every child to enter every hide and think "wow". This means the views of wildlife close to the hide are far more important than wildlife which is distant.

Feeding Stations

These are designed to get birds close to the hides, and, in particular, to visitors who don't have binoculars. Some cover needs to be provided so that birds have somewhere to flee into when a Sparrowhawk comes calling. Opportunities to exhibit other animals such as Water Vole, or Wood Mice are exploited whenever possible. The design of feeding stations is continually evolving, to try and ensure the closest contact for visitors with nature: and that "wow" thing we so badly need.



One of the essential workers

THE OPENING OF THE TED PARKER HIDE

No one who has been in the Teesmouth Bird Club for any length of time will need reminding of the achievements of the late Ted Parker and his long association with the Club. He was a member for around fifty years, having joined as a teenager, and held many different posts in the Club. He will be remembered as the driving force behind the modernisation which brought in new committee structures and led to the present very healthy state with high membership numbers.

Ted also got the Club involved in planning matters that affected birds, and he himself worked with the Scaling Dam Wildlife Advisory Committee. He was a frequent visitor to Scaling and also carried out the Wetland Bird Survey counts there. When Northumbrian Water decided to replace the old hide with a new one in a better position, it was an opportunity to pay a lasting tribute to Ted by naming the new hide after him.

The official opening was on 6th May and was attended by family, friends, TBC members and Northumbrian Water staff. Ted's widow, Ruth performed the naming ceremony by unveiling the plaque. It was touchingly apt that Don Page, Ted's long-time birding buddy, provided his tea towel as an extemporised veil!



Above : Stuart Pudney (Northumbrian Water), Brian Clasper (TBC Chairman) and Ruth Parker

Below : Ruth Parker, Don Page (TBC) and Stuart Pudney





TIT-BITS

A collection of bits and pieces of bird related news and facts.

KNOTTY PROBLEMS

Most people will be aware of the changes in bird behaviour that have occurred in response to the warming climate. One well publicised change is the earlier arrival of some summer migrants, with Swallows, House Martins, Chiffchaffs, Sand Martins, Blackcaps and Redstarts arriving over ten days earlier. At the other end of the summer season, Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs, Garden Warblers and Whinchats are staying noticeably longer. This all sounds beneficial for breeding birds, but things are never that simple, as long term monitoring of Knots has shown.

This work has been done by Dutch researchers each autumn for 30 years. They weigh and measure Knots migrating south from their high Arctic breeding grounds at a stop-over on the Polish coast. The Arctic has experienced particularly large increases in temperatures, making early melting of the snow more frequent. The researchers have found that juvenile birds weighed less and had shorter beaks in years when the snow melted early. The likely cause of this is that the birds are hatching after the peak abundance of insects, this being another example of the mismatch of breeding and prey abundance now found in several other species.

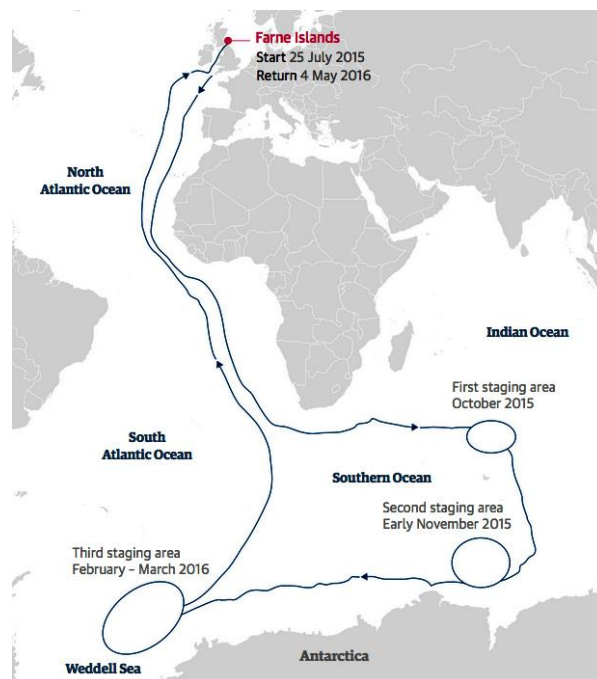
After Poland, the birds continue their migration to the wintering grounds on the coast of Mauritania in west Africa. This is where problems for the smaller young birds become evident. They feed on molluscs which are 30 to 40 millimetres below the surface and for this a shorter than average beak is a distinct handicap. They are restricted to feeding on the scarcer shallow prey and on plant rhizomes which are less nutritious. The researchers found that these shorter-beaked birds, not surprisingly, were less likely to survive their first year.

It is an interesting reflection on the effects of the warming climate that an event in the Arctic is related to one in the tropics.

RECORD-BREAKING TERN

We are all aware of the Arctic Tern's autumn migration to the Antarctic and the fact it sees more daylight than any other species. The round trip from the northern breeding grounds to the Antarctic and back is also the longest recorded for any animal. One previous estimate put the

average distance at 70,900 km (44,000 miles), but with a range of 59500 to 81600 km (37000 to 50,700 miles). One of the 29 birds from the Farne Islands colony that was fitted with a tracking device in 2015 has now set a new record of 96,000 km (59,700 miles).



Source Newcastle University

The birds obviously spend a lot of time in the staging areas where there is presumably a good supply of food. For the Farne Islands bird these are all in the southern oceans, but the birds take advantage of any available rich feeding area. Work with birds breeding in Iceland and northern Greenland found they can suspend their migration for 25 days while feeding in the North Atlantic at a location where food productivity is especially good.

The migration ability of birds continues to surprise.

THE END FOR MICROBEADS?

An article in last December's Newsletter reported on Club member Barbara Crinson's progress in investigating the use of microbeads in cosmetic products. These are the very small pieces of plastic used in facial scrubs, toothpaste and similar materials where mild abrasion is required. They also ultimately pollute the seas and damage aquatic life, including even seabirds. It is difficult to get a figure for the quantity that finds its way into the sea, but estimates vary from 16 to 86 tons from facial exfoliants in the UK. Whatever the weight, that equates to awful lot of tiny bits of plastic.

The good news is that a ban on their use is now considered by the Government. This is a victory for the people and organisations that have lobbied for such a ban, but it is only a small start to solving the problem of plastic pollution in the sea. In fact, the total number of microplastic particles on the surface of the world's oceans is reckoned by researchers at Imperial College to be 50 trillion. It's impossible to grasp a number like that, but let's say it is very, very big. The particles derived from cosmetics form only a small fraction.

The problem is that microplastics are formed from large pieces being degraded. 'Large pieces' even includes fibres washed from synthetic clothing.

The ultimate solution is to keep all plastic from the sea. That really is a challenge.

A BALDERDASH OF COLLECTIVE NOUNS

It is really quite simple : a group of birds is a flock. Depending on the number of birds and what they are doing, some possible alternatives are party, skein, and raft, but most of the time flock is perfectly adequate. But there are also a lot of silly words which supposedly refer to flocks of individual species. It is difficult to take these seriously. Is it possible to imagine some lucky person finding a flock of Ravens in Cleveland and excitedly tweeting the discovery of an unkindness?

C.E.Hare in the Noun of Assembly entry in the Dictionary of Birds (see page 19 for a recommendation of this book) describes the origins of these words. Some were a genuine part of mediaeval vocabulary that have become obsolete, some are pedants' inventions and others are just erroneous. He goes on to say, "...one would be only half serious in speaking of a 'murder' of Crows, a 'charm' of Goldfinches, a 'watch' of Nightingales, a 'nye' of Pheasants....". Claiming to be only half serious sounds like an over-estimation!

Inventing these words is easy as it is only necessary to choose one that represents some aspect of a species' appearance or behaviour. Some care is required in the choice of word. A flock of Skylarks is supposedly an exaltation, which is an obvious reference to their song flight. Unfortunately, singing Skylarks are defending territory and flocking will be the last thing on their minds.

Until recently, these words were treated as jokes, though there have been occasional charms of Goldfinches in our Annual Report. The situation is now starting to change with murmuration being the first to break into the public consciousness.

The word does sum up the sound of a flock of Starlings chattering, but now means the species' pre-roost flights. One magazine writer has already claimed it is the scientific name of these flights. The word is now spreading its wings and has turned up in the RSPB magazine where a reader described seeing a murmuration of Knots.

A book recently serialised on Radio 4 described an experiment by a farmer who rented a field and cultivated it for a year using traditional methods, to the immense benefit to the wildlife. During the course of the year he found an injured juvenile Crow which he took in to care. On releasing it, he expressed the hope that it would find a murder. And he seemed to be totally serious. Since then, a 'Murder of Crows' has appeared on the front of a greetings card. You'll have to work out for yourself under what conditions you would want to send such a card.

The most apt summing up of these words was by Mel Smith and Griff Rhys Jones in a sketch from one of their television programmes. This showed two gentlemen of leisure in a book-lined study compiling a list of increasingly ludicrous collective nouns. Their final entry neatly described their efforts : a load of b*ll*cks!

RUFF GUIDE TO WADERS

Keith Robson describes the trials and tribulations of sorting out those brown waders.

I have always had difficulty in identifying waders. To me their plumage, usually in Winter, is too similar when comparing one species with another. In particular the Ruff has caused me problems. A couple of years ago, I saw a Ruff on Saltholme, from the lay-by. It had orangey-red legs. I can remember bright colours, so I thought I had mastered Ruff identification. Next day I was in the hide at Back Saltholme. A red-legged wader landed close in front of me. Redshank I thought. Then, no; it must be a Ruff. Full of uncertainty, I said to the hide guide, "That's a Ruff, isn't it?" What a stupid question! He gave a stupid reply: "I think so". He obviously knew as much as I did. So I eventually asked the other guide, a man of great repute in local birding circles, "Is that a Ruff?" Came the reply, "No, it's a Redshank". With my tail between my legs, I explained why I thought it was a Ruff – it had red legs. The guide advised me that "you cannot rely on leg colour to identify Ruffs. Their legs can be any colour except black; except for the ones with black legs." I appreciated the lesson and enjoyed the joke. But did that not just sum up waders. Impossible unless you have learned their jizz at an early age. Later it gave me some solace when reading about Ruffs in Collins' Bird Guide; "Bill and leg colour

variable: some non-breeding males with bright orange bill-base and legs easily confused with Redshank”.

On 12th June 2016 I visited Saltholme. The previous day's reports had included Ruff. So I anticipated a difficult time ahead. It was a murky, misty, moist day. As usual I started in the Phil Stead hide. As I entered, the sole occupant remarked, “very quiet”, although he had seen a Water Rail. However, there was a Lesser Black-backed Gull standing on one of the posts, there were Sand Martins skimming the surface of the water, Common Terns dipping and Grey Heron and Little Egret poised to catch any prey which swam too close to them. Eventually the Water Rail reappeared and then two of its large chicks scuttled across a narrow channel in the reeds to be followed by two smaller chicks. one fewer than the five chicks reported the previous day. So not too quiet then, and as I left the hide a Short-eared Owl flew by and Tree Sparrows were twittering away in the surrounding trees. Whereas none of these birds were particularly rare, they would only occur in specific habitats, and it was wonderful that our local RSPB reserve was providing these habitats.

I stopped in the Visitor Centre to see whether the Sandwich Terns seen on the main lake on the previous day were still around. They were not, but news came through that Ruff and Spoonbill were in view at Paddy's Hide. So off I rushed to Paddy's. As I entered the hide, one guide; let us call him Mr Manic was hysterically claiming that he could see a black one, a white one and an orange one. The other guide, Mr Calm, stated he had the black one, and what a mess it was. They were referring to Ruffs which were on the edge of rushy vegetation, some distance away. Mr Calm let me look through his scope, and there was a sight I had never seen before; a Ruff showing its ruff. By “a mess” Mr Calm was presumably referring to the ruff fluttering. I focused in on the Ruff through my own scope. I could see there were indeed three different coloured Ruffs and one Reeve. Mr Manic claimed he could see an additional three Reeves. Next thing Mr Manic was whooping and cheering as all three males displayed their ruffs, one black, one white, and one orange. They then engaged in a sort of cock-fight, or as described in Collins, “Display involves wing flutter, short jumps, crouching with ruff erected, brief fluttering attacks on rivals with bill, legs or wings...”

I shared Mr Manic's sentiments but not his emotive reaction. As Ruff only display in May and June, and usually in communal lek in traditional areas, I was extremely privileged and lucky to

have seen this mini-lek, but managed to keep a stiff upper lip and refrain from any outward show of emotion. As did Mr Calm who was wondering whether these Ruff might breed at Saltholme, although they are very rare breeders in the UK. As so often happens on a good day when one sees something rare or exceptional while birdwatching, there were plenty of other uncommon birds to be seen. A long stay Spoonbill initially had its bill tucked in, out of sight. But it soon showed its bill. I never feel that I have really seen a Spoonbill unless I have had a good view of its bill. Later it went wading, swishing its bill to and fro, foraging for food. Before the Spoonbill moved into the water, it appeared to be surrounded by red lights. Shining through the unrelenting gloom the “red lights” were seven Black-tailed Godwits in summer plumage. In between displays by the Ruff, other species on show were Greenshank, three Sandwich Terns, a male Garganey and Avocet.

So, even without the Ruffs it would have been a very good birdwatching day. To see a species perform a rarely seen courtship display is surely the equivalent of, or even better than, a life tick. And where there are a number of different colour variations, i.e. the black, white or orange, to see them all at once was very special. I cannot think of any other species which has such extremes of colour variation in its plumage. Willow Warblers vary from bright yellow through to dull biegey-grey, but it is not the same as the pronounced differences between these three ruffs.

A couple of days later there were no further reports of the Ruffs. So it seems there will not be any breeding Ruffs at Saltholme this year. That is probably a good thing for my peace of mind. Otherwise it would be yet another regular wader to sort from the Dunlin, Knot, Redshank, Spotted Redshank, various Sandpipers, etc, etc. Nightmare!



....an orange one....

BOOKS WORTH READING

Denis Summers-Smith gives two more recommendations from his list of favourite books.

5. **Dunnock Behaviour and Social Evolution** (Oxford University Press 1992)

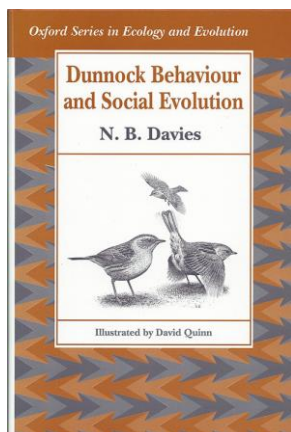
N. B. Davies

The Dunnock, or as it used to be known the Hedge Sparrow, the archetypal little brown job, was a model of industry and propriety frequently used by country parsons in their sermons. Davies in his detailed ten-year study of Dunnocks in a Cambridge park, involving 81 colour-ringed birds, revealed a very different story. The Dunnock belongs to the Accentors (*Prunella*), a family of 13 species living at high altitudes from the Pyrenees to Tibet and China, mostly above 1,000 m to as high as 8,000 m in the Himalayas.

I have seen four of them and they looked very similar to the birds in my garden. Our bird occurs up to 2,000 m in the Alps, but I have yet to find an explanation why it is the only Accentor to occur down to sea level.

It certainly appears to be busy and industrious, but Davies found out that both sexes independently try to acquire more than one mate and in this way can produce more offspring than they would have with only one partner.. Males will feed the nestlings if they believe they have fathered some of them. If a female copulates with both her partners, they will help to feed the young in her nest.

This fascinating story reads more like a modern TV soap than a natural history account in a Cambridge park. It warrants inclusion as one of my top bird books as a very readable account of the time and effort spent in a single species study.



Denis's recommendation is supported by the high prices of second-hand books. You can try Amazon – and then the Public Library!

6. **A Dictionary of Birds** (Poyser 1985)

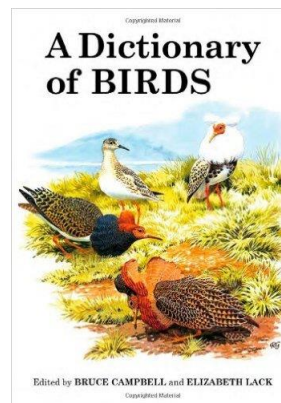
Bruce Campbell & Elizabeth Lack

This book is unusual in my selection in that it is not a good read in the strict sense. Neither is it a dictionary, but rather an encyclopedia. It is one of a series of Dictionaries of Birds, starting with *A Dictionary of Birds* (1896) written by Alfred Newton, Professor of Comparative Anatomy at the University of Cambridge, with one scientific assistant. It was truly a remarkable achievement. Newton was one of the founders of The British Ornithologists' Union.

With the enormous growth in ornithology this was no longer possible and subsequent Dictionaries have been based on about 300 contributions by invited specialists from all over the world. If I were asked by the BBC to choose my 'Desert Island Discs', it is the one book that I am allowed to take to the Desert Island and the one object a pair of binoculars. In such circumstances, I should read it from cover to cover.

Now it is the book I most often take from my shelves. It is one of what I call my 'dirty books', by which I mean the fore-edge (defined in my Collins Dictionary as 'the outer edge of the pages of a book') has become grubby through frequent flicking through to find the information I am seeking. Seldom, if ever, does it fail and I am regularly distracted by other articles that I happen to come across.

Although the topics covered are treated very thoroughly (the entry on *Plumage* extends to over four and a half pages), all technical terms explained simply. There is even an entry on *Bird Watching*. I felt very privileged to be asked to write the entry on *Sparrow*.)



The black, white, and orange ruffs on the Ruffs on the cover just happen to tie in with Keith Robson's article on page 17!

TBC PUBLICATIONS

The Following publications are available :

Birdwatchers of Teesmouth 1600 to 1960

£2 plus £1 p.& p.

Teesmouth Bird Reports 1958-1973 on a CD

£5.00 plus £1 p.& p.

Birds of Tees-side 1962-67 by Phil Stead

£5.00 plus £1 p.& p.

Birds of Tees-side 1968-1973 by Martin Blick

£5.00 plus £1 p.& p.

Birds of Tees-side (1964) by Phil Stead

£2.50 plus £1 p.& p. (*published in NHS Transactions*).

Cleveland Bird Reports:-

1974 to 2013 £3.00 each where available.

Plus £1.00 for p.& p. per copy.

(Out of print 1974, 1976, 1978 to 1988 on a CD)

2014 £7.50 each (£5.00 for TBC Members)

Plus £1.50 for p.& p. per copy

Barn Owl at RSPB Saltholme Print @ £2 each

Cheques should be made payable to:

"Teesmouth Bird Club" with orders, and sent to:

John Fletcher,
43 Glaisdale Avenue,
Middlesbrough,
TS5 7PF.

Please pass on any of your unwanted copies of Club publications to John, particularly those that are "Out of print", so that they can be resold to other members.

A BIG DISCOUNT on orders over £20

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Tel. 01642-818825

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH - WINTER 2015/2016 SUMMARY

Almost perfect coverage was achieved. For the second winter running 139 of the scheduled 140 sector counts were completed over the five months.

This winter's wigeon peak (3562, February) constitutes a new all-time Tees WeBS record. Contrastingly, the equivalent figure for mallard (212, November) is a record low. By way of illustration of the changed fortunes of these ducks at Teesmouth, back in January 1989 the Birds of Estuaries Enquiry count found 1600 mallard but only 946 wigeon. Neither figure elicited comment in that year's *Cleveland Bird Report*.

Winter 2015/2016 brought some other respectable duck maxima by the standards of recent years, among them shelduck (473, March), our best total since January 2011. Is it too much to hope that the long term decline of these emblematic ducks on the Tees has been halted? Both shoveler (169, February) and red-breasted merganser (65, February) enjoyed their best winters since 2011/2012. However, for great crested grebe (14, February and March) and coot (398, November) these were the poorest seasonal peaks for 22 and 17 years respectively.

Turning to the waders, the grey plover maximum (166, February) was the best for seven years, though that total may have been inflated by an element of double-counting. Several other species scored reasonably well by the standards of recent winters, for example ringed plover (67, December), golden plover (1223, November), dunlin (210, February), redshank (940, November) and turnstone (244, January). On the down side, the purple sandpiper peak (36, December) was the second worst on record.

Following this winter's series of counts, and measuring our five-year means of annual winter peaks against the criteria for international and national importance, the Tees and Hartlepool Bay WeBS site retains nationally important status for sanderling and regains it for gadwall.

Mike Leahey

WeBS Local Organiser

April 2016

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This is the full report for the Winter 2015/2016 Wetland Bird Survey. It was not possible to give this in the previous Newsletter since the last monthly survey in March was too late to be included.

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH - WINTER 2015/2016 SUMMARY

Species	8 November	6 December	10 January	21 February	20 March
Little Grebe	<u>29</u>	24	19	15	19
Great Crested Grebe	0	6	5	<u>14</u>	<u>14</u>
Cormorant	<u>165</u>	65	156	94	63
Mute Swan	<u>49</u>	48	44	32	20
Greylag Goose	140	271	<u>415</u>	56	116
Shelduck	209	307*	378*	445*	<u>473</u> *
Wigeon	1495	2227*	2942*	<u>3562</u> *	2457*
Gadwall	<u>262</u> **	72	23	169*	151*
Teal	866	<u>975</u>	533	564	579
Mallard	<u>212</u>	170	177	144	166
Pintail	13	24	5	<u>29</u>	20
Shoveler	145*	80	85	<u>169</u> *	119*
Pochard	22	26	41	75	<u>90</u>
Tufted Duck	78	60	49	86	<u>164</u>
Eider	0	5	16	8	<u>24</u>
Goldeneye	21	26	<u>50</u>	29	36
Red-br. Merganser	50*	37	45*	<u>65</u> *	54*
Coot	<u>398</u>	287	238	207	220
Oystercatcher	752	715	<u>1056</u>	744	465
Ringed Plover	43	<u>67</u>	59	10	25
Golden Plover	<u>1223</u>	337	342	506	2
Grey Plover	14	111	139	<u>166</u>	22
Lapwing	3176*	<u>3938</u> *	3233*	1382	172
Knot	187	<u>491</u>	395	403	275
Sanderling	158*	1	163**	184**	<u>195</u> **
Purple Sandpiper	14	<u>36</u>	0	0	35
Dunlin	63	88	103	<u>210</u>	46
Ruff	0	0	0	0	<u>2</u>
Snipe	2	<u>4</u>	1	0	<u>4</u>
Black-tailed Godwit	16	29	30	17	<u>39</u>
Bar-tailed Godwit	6	5	<u>61</u>	25	15
Curlew	485	453	<u>1139</u> *	669	454
Redshank	<u>940</u> *	584	212	636*	492
Turnstone	125	73	<u>244</u> *	118	50

* Indicates a count of >50% of national importance

** Indicates a count of national importance

N.B. 'Teesmouth' includes Hartlepool Bay.

All WeBS data are collected on behalf of the WeBS Partnership, which retains exclusive rights to the sale or supply of these data for commercial purposes

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH SPRING 2016 SUMMARY

Species	10 April	8 May	5 June
Little Grebe	<u>16</u>	15	12
Great Crested Grebe	<u>22</u>	20	19
Cormorant	<u>44</u>	43	36
Mute Swan	25	36	<u>71</u>
Shelduck	<u>422</u> *	340*	318*
Gadwall	<u>170</u>	100	154
Teal	<u>472</u>	6	9
Mallard	147	113	<u>160</u>
Shoveler	<u>137</u> *	14	17
Pochard	<u>66</u>	51	42
Tufted Duck	<u>174</u>	137	111
Eider	<u>12</u>	5	<u>12</u>
Coot	<u>174</u>	95	<u>174</u>
Oystercatcher	485	<u>703</u>	571
Avocet	52*	<u>116</u> *	58*
Ringed Plover	37	66	<u>78</u>
Golden Plover	0	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
Grey Plover	<u>2</u>	1	0
Lapwing	74	<u>127</u>	120
Knot	<u>214</u>	3	3
Sanderling	<u>283</u> **	80*	74
Purple Sandpiper	<u>2</u>	0	0
Dunlin	16	<u>120</u>	12
Ruff	0	0	0
Snipe	<u>7</u>	1	0
Black-tailed Godwit	<u>74</u>	8	19
Bar-tailed Godwit	<u>20</u>	1	0
Curlew	<u>308</u>	44	249
Redshank	<u>580</u>	26	55
Turnstone	<u>153</u>	22	7
Sandwich Tern	0	17	<u>19</u>
Common Tern	0	22	<u>280</u>
Little Tern	0	0	<u>2</u>

For the second successive spring coverage was perfect, with all 84 potential sector counts undertaken.

Shoveler (137, April) set a new WeBS seasonal record, while the 422 shelduck counted in the same month constitutes the highest spring total recorded here for 22 years. However there were disappointing seasonal maxima for cormorant (44, April), mallard (160, June) and Coot (174, both April and June); these species' poorest such figures since 1989, 1990 and 1998 respectively.

For once, the performances of most wader species this spring were positive. One of the few exceptions was lapwing, whose seasonal peak of 127 in May was the worst since 2002. Assuming that the May WeBS lapwing count is reasonably representative of our breeding population, there is still cause for concern despite recent efforts to improve wet grassland habitats and reduce predation.

The avocet maximum (116, May) was unprecedented, though may to some degree be an artefact of double-counting of mobile birds. Certainly the species was much more dispersed across the North Tees Marshes than in previous years. Black-tailed godwit (74, April) produced a new Tees spring record. Oystercatcher (703, May) returned the best seasonal figure since 1998, whilst in April knot (214) and sanderling (283) exhibited peaks unsurpassed since 2007 and 2011 respectively. The same month both curlew (308) and redshank (580) yielded their highest spring maxima for six years.

Following this series of counts, sanderling retains its nationally important status in spring.

Mike Leahey

Local Organiser

Tees Estuary Wetland Bird Survey

June 2016

Underlined counts indicate Spring 2016 maxima.

* Denotes count of >50% of national significance for that species

** Denotes count of national importance for that species

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